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Marine Being Detained On Suspicion of Spying

Sergeant Was Guard at Moscow Embassy

By Molly Moore
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A Marine Corps security guard assigned to U.S. embassies in Moscow and Vienna is in pretrial confinement at Quantico Marine base on suspicion of espionage, military officials said yesterday.

Sgt. Clayton J. Lonetree, 25, of Chicago, is under investigation for espionage, unauthorized removal and disclosure of classified information and failing to report contacts with citizens of communist-controlled nations, according to Capt. Linda Western, a Marine spokeswoman.

Lonetree has not been charged with the violations, Western said. He has been confined to the Marine correctional facility at Quantico since returning from Vienna on Dec. 31 after he "acknowledged his involvement" in the alleged spying activities to U.S. authorities, Western said.

Lonetree allegedly provided secret information to the Soviet Union through a woman believed to be an agent of the KGB, Soviet secret police, according to a State Department source who described the activities as "a classic Soviet entrapment case."

The Los Angeles Times, which yesterday reported details of the investigation, quoted an unnamed government source as saying, "It's too early to assess the extent of it . . . We believe he did provide the KGB with information that was more than just passing a few papers."

Marine Corps officials said yesterday that they could not comment on the extent of any damage caused by the alleged information leaks.

The State Department source said officials allege that Lonetree first became involved in spying operations while he was assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow between Sept. 27, 1984, and March 10, 1986, and continued throughout his posting at the U.S. Embassy in Vienna from March 11 to Dec. 31, 1986.

Marine officials said Lonetree's duties as a guard included "checking unoccupied offices for classified material left adrift and checking the security of any buildings."

A military magistrate ruled last week that Lonetree should continue to be confined, Western said. The magistrate will conduct another hearing within the next two to three weeks to determine whether there is enough evidence to charge Lonetree, she said.

The probe involving Lonetree follows a series of recent espionage cases that officials said have caused extensive damage to U.S. national security. The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence last October said it had concluded that the U.S. government has a totally inadequate counterintelligence program to combat "expanding hostile intelligence operations" against the United States.

One of the most serious of the recent cases involved a retired Navy communications specialist, John A. Walker Jr., who masterminded a family espionage ring that provided military secrets to the Soviets over 18 years. He was sentenced to life in prison. Other participants in the ring were convicted and were given prison sentences ranging up to 365 years.

Staff writer Don Oberdorfer contributed to this report.